

Tomb

Bashan Savage

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Smashwords Edition

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Chapter One

The evening sun basks over the conference room sized dinner table. The light reflecting off the polished extravagant silverware emanates an eerie glow onto the remains of a beautifully set dinner. The leftover portions of a roasted hog, stacks of fried chicken, platters of thickly sliced steak, and a pan of baked salmon makes up the center. Surrounding it are various partially or fully eaten side dishes of candied yams, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob, pan fried noodles, potato salad, and macaroni salad to name a few.

Seated at the table are ten individuals all as different as night is to day. Standing at the master end is a man in black slacks, black muscle shirt, and with a black cloth covering from under his nose to the neckline of his shirt. His eyes are pure black with no pupils but they do appear to have a reflection of the candle on the table. Another man walks in wearing a monk-style robe. Black, bald, and seemingly in his 30's, he takes a place next to the man already standing at the master end.

"Welcome, how was dinner?" Each individual guest provides some sort of a response.

"Good, would anyone like dessert?" A few shake their heads either in agreement or disagreement, while others voice their personal choice.

"Let's get to the damn point!" says one of the guests, as he slams both of his fists on the table. Silence overtakes the room.

The Host says "Sure Mr. Explode. You're right. Enough of the small talk, everyone knows everyone by now, I'm sure."

A man who is overly handsome and dressed in some royalty-style get up says, "No, not everyone knows everyone. Who's the mute? We have been here almost six hours and she hasn't spoken a word..."

"...Yeah, and what's up with the face mask and completely hidden identity bit? Body looks good, but I want see the face too." Continued the identical twin of the handsome man, also wearing a matching outfit.

"Well Zarr and Razz, too bad you can't use your special ability to read each other's thoughts on her instead or you might already know the answers to your questions," replied The Host.

"Humph." Zarr and Razz sigh.

"She, ladies and gentlemen, is Shadow, she is on hire from the Katsuya Corporation. She..." added The Host until he was interrupted.

"Katsuya Corporation?" Interrupted a short, stout and rugged looking man with a face full of hair, and sporting lumberjack gear.

Another man wearing tan khaki's, Hawaiian shirt, and mirror-like sunglasses answers, "Yeah Rugged, it's a camera company,"

"Why do we need anyone from a capitalist camera corporation?" asks Rugged with rage in his voice.

"You idiot! You need to get out more. It's a front for the Japanese mafia," snapped the man in the sunglasses.

Slamming the palms of his hands on the table, The Host takes back control of the situation, "Enough!" This gets everyone's attention focused back on him.

"Back to the issue at hand, the reason you have been gathered here. Each of you has been asked to join this venture because each of you are world renown treasure and relic hunters, each with their own unique talents or abilities which will help ensure the success of this mission."

He surveys the room, "Each of you will be paid one million dollars, half will be paid tonight and the other half will be paid upon completion of the mission. You will also be able to keep all the spoils of the trip that you may happen to pick up. All I ask in return is one item. That item is the Stone of Sunfire." A few members seem to have heard of it, but most seem to have no clue as to what it is.

"It seems that some of you have never heard of it. Well, I'm not surprised. It's rumored to have only been seen by a handful of people, and the place it was last seen is considered a myth. Only a few believe it exists, Atlantis. Since proving Atlantis exists, which has been next to impossible to prove, the Stone of Sunfire is sort of a myth of myths."

In a jokeful manner, the man in the sunglasses says, "So you want us to find Atlantis? Good luck."

"No, Mr. Bebida Blood. Fortunately an even less known myth, told among several tribes in South America tells a tale that during the brief time of turmoil rumored to occurred before Atlantis sunk, a very skillful thief sent by King Foy mama stole this item and returned it to him," says The Host.

Trip wire, a skilled adventurer and expert on ancient traps and devices asks, "King Foy mama? The King of Greed?"

"What's so special about this king?" asks Gladiator, a very muscular, all American male wearing blue jeans and a "USA Pride" T-shirt.

"Glad you asked," continues The Host, "Foy mama let his wife, the queen, run the kingdom while he sent spies and thieves to steal valuable treasures and artifacts from other kingdoms. He also led several expeditions himself. Foy mama's main interest was in mystical

objects, items rumored to have some kind of magical forces within. He used some of these items' power to grow richer and more powerful. Then news came from one of his spies that several powerful armies were joining together to steal back their treasures and plunder much more. Being driven by greed and not wanting to lose his priceless artifacts, which was the largest collection the world had ever seen, King Foymama used the Horn of Calling to summon the Demon "Poss Chandela" and begged to be able to keep his treasures forever inside the tomb he built specifically to spend his afterlife with his immense treasure. The next day when the attacking army arrived there was no sign of the tomb, it had vanished."

"Then how the hell are we supposed to find it?" asks Explode in his typical angry way.

"The same tribe I heard the tale from is the Cristah tribe, who are the actual descendants of the Foymama tribe. They carry with them the Ranakan, the Stone of Awareness, which can be used to reveal the tomb. That's where you, Natural Hack, come in. Your tracking skills with your laptop are legendary. I will supply you with all the data on the tribe including their last location."

Natural Hack nods in agreement and adds, "Just call me Hack."

The Host asks, "Rugged, I do believe you are familiar with the Kung! tribal language and their use of clicking sounds to communicate, correct?"

"You are correct."

"I know I am. They use a very similar style. It should be no problem to figure out, I did."

Zarr asks, "So how much is this Sunshine or Firestone thing worth anyways?"

Razz adds, "I was thinking the same thing."

Zarr replies, "I know, that's why I asked." They both smile at each other.

"It is priceless. But so are many of the treasures in Foymama's Tomb. To guarantee that someone does bring it back to me or that the mission was a failure because of misinformation, I've planted a mole. One of you has been a business associate of mine for quite some time and is being paid 10 million dollars to be my eyes and ears. So if one of you does find the item and tries to run, I will kill you, which is of course after I've killed several family members. I found you once and I will find you again."

During this whole spiel, The Host made eye contact with all at the table and his facial expression and tone of speech didn't change one bit.

For the second time in minutes, silence controls the room. Everyone seems to be looking at each other with accusing eyes. The only ones not looking around are Gladiator, who had been refilling his plate at a regular pace during the whole briefing, and Xiona Chang, who has been silent since dinner was placed on the table.

Gladiator notices several eyes on him. Noticeably uncomfortable, he says with a mouthful of steak, "What? I'm not a mole. I've never seen this man before in my life."

Then all eyes turn toward Xiona, who in her red traditional Chinese evening dress, was already stunning to the eyes. Now she finds eyes looking at her quite differently. She looks up at everyone, yet says nothing.

The Host interrupts this awkward moment, "Enough worrying about that. Each one of you needs your rest. Sleep well. I must be leaving now. If you need anything, my servants will be glad to assist you."

The Host walks off, followed by his apparent bodyguard. Down the hallway and out of earshot, The Host stops and says to his companion, "Kain, you're probably wondering why don't I go, instead of sending them? After all I'm more qualified and skilled than all of them put together."

Kain says nothing, with the flames still visibly burning in his eyes.

"Simply, I have other plans instead of being stuck in there for 200-300 years if the mission fails, and who knows, it might be even longer than that before anyone enters the tomb again."

Kain still stands silently.

"What's that you say, Kain? The mole? Who is it? I planted no mole, I planted something much better, distrust. If the stone is there and I believe it is, then if even only two survive, it's guaranteed to be returned because of the fear of the mole. If more than two survive, I will be truly surprised, and as you know I haven't been surprised in years. Tomorrow will be very entertaining for you."

Chapter Two

Mr. Blood walks into the same conference room as the night before to find that he's the last one to come to the breakfast table. Standing at the master end is Kain, but noticeably missing is The Host.

"So what'd I miss?" asks Bebida.

"Nothing much, Gladiator has already devoured seven pancakes, six sausages, about ten eggs...um did I miss anything?" asks Razz.

"Yeah, four glasses of OJ and five glasses of milk," adds Zarr.

"Don't forget the four biscuits," laughs Gladiator with his mouth full.

"So nothing much then?" asks Bebida.

"Nope, not really but we now know who the mole is," says Trip wire.

Hack, who has been dealing with these acquisitions all morning, frustrated, yells, "I'm not the damn mole!"

"Sure you're not!" Then why the fuck did The Host put you in charge?" charges Explode.

"I'm not in charge! He came in last night to give me the data on the tribe and left me instructions to share with everyone, since he couldn't be here today."

"So what was he wearing?" asks Rugged.

"Fuck you!" Hack yells across the table.

Laughter echoes around the room, lifting some of the tension.

"Anyways, let's hear those instructions," says Bebida.

"Good, we were waiting for you to come down. I've tracked down where the tribe is located using my connection to a Global Positioning Satellite, don't ask how. Anyways, we are to leave at 1200 hours by helicopter, which will drop us off 10 miles away from the tribe's present location."

"10 miles? Why so far away?" asks Bebida.

"Because this tribe has a leadership structure that is quite unique and no central home. All in this tribe are equal, with the exception of the one responsible for the stone. He serves as Chief, then after roughly one week, a different person receives the stone and leader role. And with no central home, there's no telling who has it all any given time," explained Hack.

"So?" questions Bebida.

Xiona answers, "These tribe members don't sleep in close quarters, with only about twenty members of this tribe, they have been found sleeping separately almost one mile away from the nearest member."

Everyone looks at Xiona, some shocked that she knew that, others surprised she talked.

Bringing the attention of everyone back to himself, Bebida asks, "So, we are performing a dragnet to make sure none escape?"

"Exactly. Cause if the one with the stone escapes, it might take days or even weeks to find him. And now we have on our side the element of surprise." answers Hack.

Rugged asks rudely, "So where's The Host at, Hack?"

"I don't know, why don't you ask Kain?" retaliates Hack.

The massive monstrosity doesn't move.

Looking at Kain, Rugged replied, "Um..I'll pass."

Explode stands up swiftly, "Want me to ask him?!"

Zarr, still seated, reaches out toward Explode, "I would think twice about that, big fellow. Something seems very odd about that one there."

Razz extends his arm also and adds, "Yes, I agree. Haven't you noticed the fire in his eyes is still there from last night, yet there is no flame that it could be reflecting?"

Zarr says, "I was just thinking the same thing."

Razz replies, "I know you were."

They both look at each other and smile.

Explode now notices the flame but still says, "So, I'm not scared of no punks with trippy contacts!"

Xiona stands up, "It's not about being scared, it's about being smart. Something I can tell most at this table lack.

As she gets up from the table and starts to exit the room, Explode yells, "Shut up, mole!"

Hack asks calmly, "Can we all get back on track please? The helicopter will be ready for departure soon."

The remaining guests look at Explode.

Explode is wondering why everyone is looking at him, "What?"

No one says anything. Finally Explode sits back down, while Kain remains the same.

"Don't worry about Xiona's part. I'll brief her on the copter. Okay here's the plan..." Hack continues.

Finally, every member seems focused, including Gladiator, who has finally stopped eating.

Chapter Three

"Now!" yells Hack, from the cover of some bushes. A split second later an explosive device lands in the center of what resembles a central activity area of the tribe. A minor explosion is followed by plenty of smoke and villagers trying to flee.

"Bingo!" yells Tripwire, as four tribe people are slung up into the air and trapped in a net.

Two other villagers are double-arm clotheslined and dropped by Gladiator as they try to run into the bushes. "Oh yeah! Man, I really miss wrestling."

The smoke is clearing. Hack asks, "Is that every one of them?" Razz, as he holds a villager, answers, "Yeah."

"I believe so," adds Zarr, who also is holding one.

Shadow walks out of the bushes into the clearing with a villager already bound.

"Yeah, that's all of them, counting the six we caught on the outskirts," says Hack, as Xiona comes out of the brush with those six shackled together.

"So how we are supposed to know which one has the stone?" asks Rugged.

"I don't know aren't you the language specialist?" replies Hack.

"Um...oh yeah," Rugged turns toward the closest villager and asks in the tribe's native tongue, which he has been learning from the previous six hostages.

The villager replies back with similar clicking sounds.

"What'd he say?" asks Hack.

"Just like the other villagers, he says he doesn't know what I'm talking about."

Bebida adds, "It sounds like a damn old broken typewriter, you sure he understood you, old man?"

"I'm pretty sure he did, it's not a difficult language to understand, but most of you Americans are tone deaf from years of the boob tube and loud rock music," fires back Rugged.

"Hey, I'm not an American and I have no clue what either of you two said," states Tripwire.

Visibly frustrated, Hack says "Does it really fucking matter who else understands what? Just fucking ask him again, okay?"

"Yeah, whatever. Damn capitalist pigs," says Rugged. He then turns around and repeats his previous question to the villager.

The villager gives what sounds like the same answer.

"Well?" asks Hack.

"He still says he doesn't know what we are talking about."

Explode pulls out his gun from his leg strap, aims and shoots, "I bet he understands this!" The villager that Shadow was holding drops to the ground dead with a hole in his chest.

Xiona yells, "What the hell are you doing?"

Explode yells, "Shut the fuck up, bitch!" He turns his gun toward her but before he could make the full swinging motion, a ninja star knocks the gun out of his hand and another star sticks into the leg holster where his gun was, only inches away from his family jewels.

"If you ever aim a weapon at me or speak to me in that tone again, your gun won't be the only thing falling to the ground," threatened Xiona, now holding in front of her a sword, gripped with both hands.

Explode is pissed, but realizes he's in no position to argue. He removes the star from his leg and throws it to the ground.

Some of the villagers are now crying and struggling to no avail to be close to their fallen fellow tribe member.

"Maybe now, we'll get some damn answers," says Explode.

"Yeah, you're probably right," said Bebida, as he dipped his fingers in the fresh wound of the dead villager. He sucks the blood off his fingers, while standing in the face of another villager. Bebida smiles exposing some of his fanged teeth, "Just maybe, you're right."

Gladiator is standing nearby with the two he captured, who are now tied to a tree. "Awe, you're fucking sick, man!" He then turns and vomits in nearby bushes.

"Hmmm," Bebida smiles as he looks at the dead body, "A fresh new taste."

One of the villagers, a male, starts yelling something in his native tongue. Rugged walks over to him and starts conversing.

"Well?" asks Hack.

"Well it looks like Explode's tactics worked. This boy has the stone," replies Rugged.

Explode grins, "See, I fucking told you."

Hack approaches the villager who appears to be in his late teens early twenties. "Ask him where the Tomb is located."

Rugged and the villager exchange words, "He said he will show you if you spare his people."

"Brave for his age. Admirable. Okay, tell him no problem, consider it done," answers Hack to the dismay of Explode who mumbles something and walks off into the bush. Hack continues, "But assure him that if this is a trick, that we will return and slaughter every last one of them while he is forced to watch."

Rugged relays the message, the villager replies. Rugged confirms to Hack, "Understood."

"Good," Hack orders everyone to release the villagers and head back to camp. Everyone does as told.

Chapter Four

Back at camp, all the members of the expedition are present, including their new captive. Gladiator is over in a clearing doing push-ups. Explode is sitting on a rock cleaning his gun. Rugged is catching a nap in the shade of a tree. Zarr, Razz and Tripwire are sitting by a fire laughing about something. Bebida is leaning back against a tree, enjoying its shade and a drink from his canteen.

Hack walks past everyone toward Xiona, who is staring out into an open field. He passes the tree the villager is tied to. Shadow is perched above on a branch of the same tree. She stares down at Hack. He doesn't notice.

"Xiona Chang, right?" Hack attempts to make small talk as he sits down next to her.

"What is it that you want?"

"I just felt like talking, that's all."

"No you don't. All of you are so readable. You want information."

Hack feels uncomfortable and embarrassed that she saw right through him. He's never been too good at talking to women.

"Ok, you got me. As you can tell, I'm an information junkie. That's why I always have my laptop."

"Your point?"

"Well my point is. I don't understand why I was told to lead this part of the expedition."

"I thought you weren't told 'to lead'."

"I lied." Hack answered, smiling like a child who just got caught with their hand in the cookie jar.

Xiona finally breaks her usual serious demeanor and serene look with a slight smile. "OK, I don't have an answer to that question but what else would you like to know?"

Hack says, "OK. Well first, several members of this group don't seem to exist anywhere but here. There's nothing, nada, zilch on them. I've looked high and low and everywhere in between. And I have so many sources that I could tell you if Elvis is alive and if so, what he's wearing right now. Wanna know?"

"Don't care."

"Good, neither do I." Hack smiles

Xiona smiles a real full smile. "Who do you want to know about?"

"Shadow."

"What about her?"

"Anything. There's nothing."

“Well, there’s not much known about her. Just rumors.”

“Rumors like?”

“Rumors such as that she is a genetically enhanced assassin working for the Katsuya Corporation.”

“The Japanese Mafia? Oops, I mean camera company.” Hack laughs, as almost anyone who’s into information like him knows that the camera company is a front for the mob. Well everyone but the police, it seems.

“Yes. Rumor is she was a drug-addicted whore. She was taken off life support and her family assumed she was dead. Well at least, that is one of the rumors. Anyway, the Japanese public is terrified of her existence, since it is said that no one who has seen her has lived to tell about it.”

“Wow, what a story. Well I’m not scared. Ok, what about sick boy over there. Mr. Bebida Blood, I know the name means something with blood, I’m thinking drinking right? Anyways, what’s his story?”

“He’s a sad story actually. He was a soldier who was accidentally left behind during an unauthorized mission during the Gulfusta War. Not able to go back for him without admitting they were there in the first place, he was left for dead. Somehow the information got out to the media and back to his father, a high-ranking official who ordered a rescue mission, but it was nearly a month later.”

Hack interrupts her, “Hey I remember that, ‘Operation Bring Him Home’ The war was over but the Gulfustans had lost communication with that camp about the same time he was dropped there. The Gulfustans blamed it on the U.S.”

“Correct.”

“When the U.S. finally arrived at the camp, it was abandoned right? Something about the water supply ran out and some of the soldiers probably died in the desert and that others probably just went home but there was no sign of the soldier. Everyone guessed he died in the desert.”

“That is what the media was told. But rumor is that all 22 Gulfusta officers stationed there were found dead, most of the bodies drained of their blood. And there was evidence that someone had lived there in a cell. When the rescue party arrived they discovered fresh tire tracks and an unidentified body. This is how they believed the soldier ‘disappeared’.”

Hack and Xiona both look over at Bebida, who has just finished drinking from his canteen. He’s wiping away a red color liquid from the corner of his lips.

“Wow, some weird fucks we have out here with us.” Hack exclaims.

“Agreed. So how did you know that I would be able to answer your questions?”

“That’s why they call me ‘The Natural Hack’. I’ve got natural instincts. Plus you seemed very confident of yourself.”

“I am.” Xiona said. She looks forward into the direction she was when he first approached.

Trying to gain back her attention, Hack adds, “And very talented too, I might add. I never have seen anyone throw two stars at the same time at two separate targets with such accuracy.”

Without turning toward him and barely acknowledging him, Xiona says, “And you still haven’t. I only threw one.”

Confused and dumbfounded, “If you only threw one. Who threw the other?” Then Hack looks around for the only other member of the group who seemingly would even possess throwing stars. He finds Shadow in the tree not far away. He realizes that she has never taken her eyes off him from when he first approached Xiona.

“Whoa!” said Hack, who was startled to see her staring at him, “I see Explode has managed to make more than one person angry with that stunt.”

Shadow, still perched on the branch, looks away.

“Apparently.” Answered Xiona in a tone that makes it obvious that the charm of the moment is gone. She adds, “Now if you don’t mind, I would like to go back to sleep.”

Again confused, Hack asks, “Back to sleep? When I approached you, your eyes were open.”

Xiona confirms, “Yes, I know.”

Hack shakes his head as he gets up and heads back to join the group by the fire.

Chapter Five

The airborne helicopter, at full capacity, flies high above the jungle. Kain is at the helm.

Hack, who is sitting next to Xiona, leans over and asks her, “Can I please ask you one more question?”

Xiona doesn't look at him but agrees to answer.

“Ok, thanks. Any info on the twins?” Asks Hack.

“What do you know?”

“That they were one of Romania's most famous circus attractions until they were kicked out, but for what I don't know. And that's all I know about them.”

“They were sold to the Romania's circus as toddlers. Rumor is their unique ability scared the hell out of their parents, but made them world famous. They were kicked out of the circus after it was found out that they had been stealing items from the royalties where they would sometimes perform.”

“Oh I see.”

Rugged interrupted their conversation. “So what are we gonna call the captive?”

Hack answers. “Whatever his name is. What else would we call him? But I don't think any of you city folk could pronounce his name without breaking your tongues.”

Gladiator says, “We can call him Wednesday. Just like that little villager dude on that one old TV show.”

“I think his name was Tuesday, Wednesday was on that other show and that was a girl.” Adds Tripwire.

“Fine, whatever. Then let's just call him Friday.”

“That will not work either. That was the name of some cop on some detective show.”

“Well why don't you just ask Shadow or Kain?” Razz asked.

Zarr added, “I'm sure they're full of ideas.”

Razz and Zarr both look at each other, then both smile and laugh. Shadow and Kain have not spoken one word, since they've first been introduced, respectively.

“Fuck Kain,” Explode yells.

Kain remains unaffected by the comment that echoed throughout the copter. Shadow sitting up front in the co-pilot seat doesn't look back either.

“Can't we ever talk without an argument?” Demands Hack as he surveys everyone with accusing eyes. “Shit, we'll just call him “boy”. Now anyways, we are at the site and the copter is about to touch down.”

“I don’t see anything but jungle. I thought this tomb was supposed to be huge.” Said Gladiator.

“That’s because it’s not revealed yet. The tomb is trapped in time, at the exact instant the King’s wish was granted.” Explained Xiona.

“Uh, how’d you know that? Did I miss something?”

“No you didn’t miss anything. But the fact that she’s the mole.” Added Explode, but this time in a calm tone.

Finally frustrated with all the allegations, Xiona stands up in the copter as it makes its descent. “Don’t you idiots get it? There is no mole. This is one of the oldest tricks in the book. By building distrust, he guarantees the safe return of the item he wants, if it even exists.”

“Yeah, but you have to admit...”

Razz continued his brother’s words; “...you do seem to know a lot more about this mission...”

“...than the rest of us.” This time Tripwire finishes Razz’s comment.

All three of them look at each other and laugh.

“Exactly my point, mole!” Explode added.

Tired of explaining herself, Xiona sits back down and mutters, “Whatever, why do I even try?”

“Are we done with that subject, again? As soon as we’ve landed, I will use my laptop to determine where we can stand or not stand. You guys unload the copter.”

Bebida asks, “Where we can and can’t stand?”

Hack explains, “Yes. You see like Xiona explained earlier. The tomb is sealed in time. Bushes and trees and all the various things you see around you were not here in the past. The laws of Relativity states that two objects cannot be in the same place at the same time. Everything in front of you will probably cease to exist while the tomb is present. At least that’s the theory. And I don’t believe anyone of you want to cease to exist right?”

“Whoa! Too much at one time.” States a confused Gladiator.

“Gladiator, just please go help unload the equipment and gear, while I measure.”

Hack walks forward, while everyone else is busy unloading their gear.

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